

Wessel Fledderus
5140 words
11-3-2010

Living on Doubt: Doubt and Control in Beckett's "First Love"

The narrator of Beckett's short story "First Love," like so many other characters in Beckett's work, is forced to enter a world he does not want to be in and does not understand. Whereas a large portion of Beckett's characters questions knowledge and its mediators, such as language and mathematical systems,¹ doubt plays an even more prominent role in "First Love." The narrator states that he "lived of course in doubt, on doubt" (147), which already assumes the permanent state of doubt everyone should be in, but moreover claims that doubt is necessary to live.

From this perspective, "First Love" becomes a study of the narrator's doubts. The narrator tries to structure his existence by means of notes, measurements and a system of living, but confesses and stresses that he knows nothing for sure. His uncertainty is increased by his feelings of love for Lulu, which he does not understand and cannot control. Throughout the story, the narrator tries to control his love, without success. The powerlessness of the narrator to control himself reminds of the Cartesian division between mind and body, which in turn returns to fundamental doubt concerning all impressions and sensory input. In addition, agency becomes confused, as it is unsure whether the mind controls the body, the body controls the mind, or both are controlled by external forces. In an attempt to understand himself, the narrator uses the story to reflect on his previous behaviour, but it is exactly his need to systemise and control reality that prevents him from truly understanding the world around him.

¹This is especially true for *Watt*. The Oxford Encyclopaedia of British Literature states that: "The closer that Watt comes to Mr. Knott, the more uncertain he becomes of his own stability as a character, and the more unruly and comically out of control becomes the language of the novel. (...) [Mr. Knott] produces an environment in which language no longer has the power to fix the world in place." In addition, the absolute truths of mathematics are undermined by incorrect calculations.

The opening lines of "First Love" already show that the narrator doubts his own mind and judgment and is aware of his limited knowledge: "I associate, rightly or wrongly, my marriage with the death of my father, in time. That other links exist, on other planes, between these two affairs, is not impossible. I have enough trouble as it is in trying to say what I think I know" (133). The narrator accepts his limited scope, because he has problems expressing his own thoughts. His inability to perceive connections between his thoughts and statements recurs once more in the story, again indicative of his own uncertainty: "I see no connexion between these remarks. But that one exists, and even more than one, I have little doubt, for my part. But what? Which?" (143). It seems contradictory for the narrator to express these questions about his own thoughts, but it is indicative of his uncertainty. He seems to find fault in his own lack of understanding, questioning the connections he establishes himself and stressing there are more he does not know.

The need to connect and systematise unknown things is another expression of the narrator's doubt. He carries a note to remember the dates of his father's birth and death (133), and argues he should have done the same to remember Lulu's full name: "(...) the name of the woman with whom I was soon to be united was Lulu. So at least she assured me and I can't see what interest she could have in lying to me, on this score. Of course one can never tell. She also disclosed her family name, but I've forgotten it. I should have made a note of it, on a piece of paper, I hate forgetting a proper name" (138). The narrator mistrusts Lulu, although he recognises that his uncertainty is probably unfounded, since there is no reason for her to tell him lies. Still, the narrator cannot be sure and this annoys him. His need to make a note of Lulu's last name is indicative of his desire to know things for sure. Moreover, he expresses his discontent at forgetting a proper name at all, which indicates his anxiety about uncertainty yet again.

Although the narrator of “First Love” seems disconnected from his environment and confesses he understands nothing fully (141-2), his notes and established facts allow him to position himself in it by means of measuring and deduction. Since he remembers his birthday more or less precisely and has the date of his father’s death close to him, he is “thus in a position to affirm that I must have been about twenty-five at the time of my marriage” (133). Similarly, he declares he thought of Lulu or Anna, “long long sessions, twenty minutes, twenty-five minutes and even as long as half an hour daily. I obtain these figures by the addition of other, lesser figures” (145). These deductions show how the narrator prefers to calculate as much as possible, in order to achieve certainty. As his memory is failing him at some instances, the reconstruction of facts by other facts is the only way to do this.

In his essay “Beckett’s Measures,” Daniel Katz investigates the need for Molloy and the narrator of “First Love” to measure and analyse things. According to Katz, measuring is a source of pleasure for both protagonists. However, pleasure is not the only reason for their measuring:

(...) if measuring is itself a source of pleasure, pleasure (...) is best measured (in all senses). As a result, measuring emerges very much as a compromise formation in much of Beckett, for if measuring serves to establish and preserve distances, to keep things in their place, to maintain a certain order—that is, if measuring often serves the traditional ends of moderation—equally often in Beckett the pleasure *is* the distance, the separation, the boundary. Measuring both partakes of and permits the familiar tele-erotics of Beckett, the manifold schemas that both link and divide, in which the establishing of a division is the link. (Katz 149)

Measuring allows the characters to establish connections and divisions, which provide the pleasure of distancing from or connecting with reality. Katz argues that the pleasure that is found in measuring is evident in *Molloy*, where Molloy collects sixteen sucking stones and

tries to devise a system that would ensure that he sucks all stones in the right order (*Molloy* 298-305). Although Katz argues that “the relationship of measure to pleasure arises with clarity in the sucking-stones passage” (249), Molloy states that “to suck the stones in the way I have described, not haphazard, but with method, was also I think a bodily need” (*Molloy* 305). In addition, he states: “deep down it was all the same to me whether I sucked a different stone each time or always the same stone, until the end of time. For they tasted exactly the same” (305). Molloy’s conflicting statements suggest that although it is a bodily need to suck the stones in order, he does not care whether he fulfils this need.

It seems more accurate then to conclude that Molloy’s systemising is not a pleasure, but a need, which he does not care about but that disturbs him physically nevertheless, if not satisfied. Katz draws the same conclusion: “Indeed, ‘measuring’ in Beckett seems hardly a way of ordering or controlling the world, a Cartesian ‘method’ of mastering it (despite what some of his narrators on occasion profess), but rather an activity that becomes its own *raison d’être*, with its alleged ‘practical’ ends serving as no more than a pretext for the process, in and of itself” (248, original italics). Molloy’s rejection of his earlier systems and problems confirms this, since his earlier attempts to justify his actions are annulled. The aim of the measuring is shifted from acquiring insight in the objects measured to the pleasure of measuring in itself.

However, this claim is not fully applicable to the narrator of “First Love.” Although he is in several ways similar to Molloy, he cannot as yet simply do away with his need to measure what he can. On several occasions, he expresses his problems with uncertainties and doubt. For example, when he feels Lulu’s face is neither young nor old, “stranded between the vernal and the sere” (“First Love” 149), he states that: “Such ambiguity I found difficult to bear, at that time” (149). His attempts to solve ambiguities are illustrated by the way he leaves Lulu when she is singing:

Then I started to go and as I went I heard her singing another song, or perhaps more verses of the same, fainter and fainter the further I went, then no more, either because she had come to an end or because I was gone too far to hear her. To have to harbour such a doubt was something I preferred to avoid, at that period. I lived of course in doubt, on doubt, but such trivial doubts as this, purely somatic as some say, were best cleared up without delay, they could nag at me like gnats for weeks on end. (147-8)

To make sure whether the singing stopped he walks back, hears it again, but after a while it stops again. To check whether it had stopped or was simply growing fainter, he moves closer still. However, he then realises it is futile: “Then in despair, saying, No knowing, no knowing, short of being beside her, bent over her, I turned on my heel and went, for good, full of doubt” (148). As Katz points out, the narrator at this point prefers “the somatic doubt to the certainty of somatic proximity” (253).

The division between the doubts one has to live with, and on, and more mundane, physical doubts, is important. The mundane doubts, “purely somatic as some say” (148), can be resolved and should be, as soon as possible, to prevent these doubts from controlling one’s life. However, this simple kind of doubt is still dominating the life of the narrator at the time of the marriage. This also becomes evident in the way the narrator names things and reflects on his own descriptions. For example, the narrator frequently calls things by another name and is aware of his own deviations. About halfway in the story, he suddenly decides to give Lulu another name: “Anyhow I’m sick and tired of this name Lulu, I’ll give another, more like her, Anna for example, it’s not more like her but no matter” (144). The sudden desire to alter his term for Lulu seems absurd, especially when his motivation for changing it is nullified in the last part of the sentence.

This confused mislabelling of things happens more often, for example when Lulu brings the narrator a pan to serve as a chamber pot: “She came back with a kind of saucepan,

not a true saucepan for it had no handle, it was oval in shape with two lugs and a lid. My stewpan, she said” (152). Although in retrospective the narrator must know that the pan was in fact a stew pan, he calls it a saucepan, only to ascertain that it is not “a true saucepan.” The narrator contradicts his own judgments frequently throughout the story, usually within the same sentence. He states that as he moves the furniture from Lulu’s “parlour,” that “[s]he watched, in sorrow I suppose, but not necessarily” (151). The immediate undermining of the narrator’s presumption leaves the reader without any solid information.

Katz links these confused sentences to Molloy and also points out the similarity between the renaming of Lulu and Molloy’s conscious mislabelling of his sucking stones. When Molloy introduces his sucking stones, he states: “I took the advantage of being at the seaside to lay in a store of sucking stones. They were pebbles, but I call them stones” (298). Katz states: “The point here is perhaps less to attempt to distinguish why the word ‘pebbles’ might be a less satisfactory choice than ‘stones’ than to simply recognize the need for the object in question to be bounded not only by mathematical but also by strict linguistic symbolization” (248). The assumption that objects can be accurately labelled is followed by a desire to be precise in the matter, but both Molloy and the narrator of “First Love” then reject this model of linguistic accuracy, which confuses the reader but also leaves both protagonists hanging in between scientific precision and disregard. In short, the characters know and care about the accurate words, but reject them. This rejection shows that both characters are not satisfied by their own intellectual judgment, suggesting that they question and doubt all statements and measurements that have been made before them as well as those they make themselves.

According to Katz, “First Love” is structured around the three episodes in which the narrator tries to understand and control sounds from a distance, which show the protagonist’s “desire for measuring” and “all involv[e] the determination of the origin and distance of a

sound (both 252). First, there is Lulu's singing, later the "stifled groans and giggles" of her visitors and finally the screams during her childbirth ("First Love" 154). Similar to the experiment with Lulu's singing, the sounds of Lulu's visitors awake in the narrator the need to know for sure:

In vain I tried to listen to such reasonings as that air is made to carry the clamours of the world, including inevitably much groan and giggle, I obtained no relief. I couldn't make out if it was always the same gent or more than one. Lovers' groans are so alike, and lovers' giggles. I had such horror then of those paltry perplexities that I always fell into the same error, that of seeking to clear them up. (154)

Again, the narrator expresses the need to resolve his doubts in order to prevent further anxiety. It also becomes clear that he tries to resist the urge to solve the questions by "reasonings." However, he fails and asks Lulu, but the answer is "a fat lot of help" (155). The narrator already knew that this was going to be the case, but was unable to control himself.

The narrator's inability to control himself is a prominent theme in the story, which is closely linked to his struggling with his uncertainty. The lack of control is found primarily in the inability of the narrator to control his body. As noted above, the urge to measure may well be considered a need that is more bodily than intellectual and this idea is supported by the concept of 'somatic doubts.' In addition, the narrator often distances himself from his body, emphasising that acts on its own. According to Elizabeth Barry, "[c]ritics of Beckett's work often speak of the unseating of the Cartesian mind in his work, where it is no longer able to guide, control, and investigate the body with authority" (122). This is also true for "First Love," where the narrator loses authority over his body.

The most obvious loss of control arises the second time Lulu and the narrator meet each other on the bench. The narrator is no longer himself, as he is "at the mercy of an erection, physically too" and states: "One is no longer oneself, on such occasions, and it is

painful to be no longer oneself, even more painful if possible than when one is. For when one is one knows what do to be less so, whereas when one is not one is any old one irredeemably ("First Love" 154). The narrator is unable to control his behaviour and is at the mercy of his body. It is only afterwards that he regains the authority over his body, "[w]hen she had finished and my self been resumed, mine own" (154). The erection does not only distance the narrator from his body, but also from his mind, as he no longer knows "what to do to be less" oneself. His physical needs control him and temporarily overpower his will.

In many ways, "First Love" deals with the narrator's thoughts about his loss of control. When the narrator is forced out of the protected environment of his father's house, into life and into love, he tries to remain in control of his self. Even before he falls in love, the narrator is struggling to maintain order in his mind, which is in a continuous state of doubt. He tries to understand the world by measurement, trying to avoid ambiguities or solve them immediately. His love for Lulu complicates matter further, as his mind also wanders off to her. The narrator states: "I had to contend with a feeling which gradually assumed to my dismay, the dread name of love" (143). Later on: "Yes, I loved her, it's the name I gave, still give alas, to what I was doing then. I had nothing to go by, having never loved before, but of course had heard of the thing, at home, in school, in brothel and at church, and read romances, in prose and verse, under the guidance of my tutor, in six or seven languages, both dead and living, in which it was handled at length" (143-4). These statements already indicate the narrator's dislike to love, which he tries to understand by means of his studies and knowledge. He continues: "I was therefore in a position, in spite of all, to put a label on what I was about when I found myself inscribing letters of Lulu in an old heifer" (145). The narrator distances himself from his actions, and significantly, puts a label on his behaviour, like he would write a note concerning an object. As he finds himself writing Lulu's name, his body seems to act on

its own. In the words of S. Jean Walton: the narrator is “disowning all responsibility for this uncharacteristic behavior” (563).

In an attempt to further classify his condition, the narrator tries to deduce what category of love he is experiencing. Returning to labels he has acquired in his studies, he suggests that his love might be “the priapic one,” or rather “a different variety,” or perhaps “Platonic love” or even “intellectual love” (“First Love” 144-5). It is when analysing his condition that the narrator deduces the number of minutes he thinks of Lulu, or Anna, “by addition of other, lesser figures” (145). To try and regain control of his mind, the narrator approaches his feelings systematically and detached, as if they were not his own.

Elizabeth Barry has investigated the role of the middle voice in Beckett’s work. The concept of the middle voice is explained grammatically as a verb that is neither active nor passive, objective nor subjective, and as such leaves open the question of agency. This grammatical ambiguity provides the opportunity to create ambiguous or unsolved meanings in literature. Barry argues:

The relationship between mind and body is central to resolving questions of agency in Beckett's work, and it is revealing that verbs of bodily action or experience frequently take the middle voice. Beckett's protagonists discover themselves through such actions. Actions that are performed by the body on itself, or express or serve its physical imperatives, such as lying down, standing up, resting, leaning, or (...) scratching, stretching, yawning, and belching, are all verbs of the middle voice in languages in which that voice is marked. All these actions seem straightforwardly volitional, but in Beckett's works are transformed into something much more problematic. Such bodily actions also represent an ontological dilemma that underpins Beckett's writing. (17-8)

Barry provides examples from many of Beckett's works, such as *Waiting For Godot*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*. Clearly, the passage is also applicable to "First Love."

The narrator often finds his body doing things on its own accord, usually motivated by his love for Lulu or its own needs. However, the ambiguity of agency in respect to the functioning of the body is part of a larger authority problem. The narrator does not control his thoughts either and seems at mercy of the quirks of his mind, such as the compulsory solving of doubts.

In order to counter the effect love has on him, the narrator gives in to his desires and returns to Lulu. After an unsuccessful first endeavour, he ends up at her house the second time. He states: "I did not feel easy when I was with her, but at least free to think of something else than her, of the old trusty things, and so little by little, (...) of nothing" (149-50). His desires seem to be satisfied in her vicinity and thereby he regains control of his thoughts. When he has installed himself on the sofa in the emptied room he thinks: "Already my love was waning, that was all that mattered. Yes, already I felt better, soon I'd be up to the slow descents again, the long submersions, so long denied me through her fault" (152-3). This hopeful passage suggests that the narrator has succeeded in defeating love by embracing Lulu's presence, which allows him to focus on his other doubts again, spending long sessions thinking about his pains.

At Lulu's place, the narrator is confronted by new questions. As noted before, his uncertainty about knowledge and language becomes clear once more when he asks for a chamber pot, that is a stew pan but is called a saucepan, but also when Lulu leaves him: "I heard her steps in the kitchen and then the door of her room close behind her. Why behind her?" (153). Again, the narrator questions the accuracy of language, but this is only one part of his doubts. It is at this period that he becomes troubled with the groans and giggles of

Lulu's visitors and has to find out who is making the noises in order to reduce the "horror (...) of those paltry perplexities" (154).

Finally, when Lulu is giving birth, the narrator flees his room and walks away from the house. There he engages for the third time in the analysis of sound, although this time, he describes it as "playing" (157). Katz argues that "[a]fter the previously stated obsessions with dispelling doubt, or 'unknowing' it is easy to overlook just how much, in this final episode, is left in the utmost uncertainty" (254). It is again unsure where the cries come from,² but the narrator seems preoccupied with his ability to control his own perception of the cries: "As long as I kept walking I didn't hear them, because of the footsteps. But as soon as I halted I heard them again, a little fainter each time, admittedly, but what does it matter, faint or loud, cry is cry, all that matters is that it should cease. For years I thought they would cease. Now I don't think so any more" (157-8). In spite of his efforts to control the cries, the narrator is still haunted by them, even after many years. This could be due to his personal dislike to the situation, or again to his uncertainties about the nature of the cries and whether they stopped or not. Since he fled the area because of the crying, he was unable to establish whether it stopped and is still haunted by his doubts concerning it.

Jean Walton notes that like the way the narrator tries to "gain mastery" over Lulu's singing when walking towards and away from it (560), he now "has no recourse but to try to manipulate Lulu's insistent cries in the same way he has attempted to manipulate her singing" (562). This interpretation is based on Freud's interpretation of his grandson's *Fort/Da*-game, in which the child brings a spool in and out of sight declaring it either 'gone' or 'there,' as

² Katz points out that the text leaves the source of the cries unclear and ambiguous: "A similar temptation, which the text in many ways encourages, is that of assuming the 'cries' here are of the new-born infant, although this assumption is not entirely borne out by the text in the two places it qualifies their nature and provenance. The following passage certainly identifies the crying with the child: 'What finished me was the birth. It woke me up. What that infant must have been going through!' A phrase a few lines later, however, seems to imply something different: 'Precautions would have been superfluous, there was no competing with those cries. It must have been her first.' This phrase seems to imply the mother's cries from the pain of birth and not the child's birth cries." In addition, he argues that "critics tend to assimilate the narrator's child to a son, whereas the infant's gender is never specified by the text" (254)

means of controlling his mother's absence (*Jean Walton* 560).³ One of Freud's explanations for the child's symbolic re-enactment of his mother's absence is that by staging it himself he can control it. Like Freud's grandson, the narrator of "First Love" plays with both the singing and the crying to try and control it, as well as ascertaining its source and whether it is still going on or not. These two passages are central to the text not only from a structural perspective, but also show how the notions of control and doubt dominate the narrator's behaviour and thought.

Since the story is told in retrospective, the narrator comments on his own behaviour at the time of his marriage. It becomes clear that the narrator has managed to change himself:

It took me a long time, my lifetime so to speak, to realize that the colour of an eye half seen, or the source of some distant sound, are closer to Giudecca in the hell of unknowing than the existence of God, or the origins of protoplasm, or the existence of self, and even less worthy than these to occupy the wise. It's a bit much, a lifetime, to achieve this consoling conclusion, it doesn't leave you much time to profit by it. (154)

This insight reminds of the division between the doubts of a physical nature and the doubts people live in, and on. The narrator has learned that it is even more agonising to try to solve these "somatical" doubts than to attempt to answer the great questions of life. Moreover, he knows now that both are not worth the attention he gave them earlier and suggests that although he is late in realising this, he has finally found consolation.

It seems that the narrator has been able to rid himself of his obsessive doubtful and systemising nature and has found peace of mind at last. This is reinforced by another statement of the narrator, concerning Lulu: "She disturbed me exceedingly, even absent. Indeed she still disturbs me, but no worse now than the rest. And it matter nothing to me now, to be disturbed, or so little, what does it mean, disturbed, and what would I do with myself if I

³ The *Fort/Da*-game is used extensively by both Jean Walton and Katz to explain why the narrator of "First Love" walks towards and away from Lulu's singing and the cries of her childbirth. Their analysis of the *Fort/Da*-game is nearly the same.

wasn't? Yes, I've changed my system, it's the winning one at last" (141). The narrator has adapted his mind to include disturbings and is capable of accepting them. Doubts and uncertainties, formerly a source of great discomfort, are supposedly no longer of any concern to him. Jean Wanton phrases it similarly: "To have changed his system seems to embrace disturbance as something necessary and in fact essential to his sense of self. Rather than resist disturbance, he affects a welcoming, or at least indifferent, posture toward it" (558). However, the fact that the narrator talks about a system already suggests that he has not changed that much. His dealings with reality are still regulated by a system, which suggests that he still needs to control himself by means of systemising himself and the world. In addition, many of the examples of the author's doubts about language and expression are not simply doubts of his past, but are a part of his recording of the story afterwards. In short, the narrator is not rid of his earlier compulsions, although he believes he has finally attained a "winning system."

This conclusion evokes the question why the narrator is telling his story in the first place. The story seems a confession of the narrator's undesired expulsion into the world and his equally undesired love for Lulu. The confession is interrupted by passages of reflection, which indicates that the narrator is trying to understand his previous behaviour. The entire story becomes an attempt to understand himself, which rhymes wonderfully well with the compulsory behaviour of the narrator at the time of his marriage. Jean Walton claims that "he still hears the cries, even as an old man; they constitute the 'disturbance' that he has incorporated into his 'winning' system, the 'killing memories' that cannot be stamped out but at least enfeebled by constant repetition, by coaxing them to appear and disappear in between the paces of his footfalls, the traces of his words" (562). The narrator has not succeeded in controlling the memories of his first love and tries to understand them by retelling the entire story. The story becomes part of his need to systemise and understand, and is therefore not a voluntary process but again an imperative. Jean Walton states: "the story [is] extorted from

the writer, who hopes finally to be restored to himself and to the silence from which he believes he has come” (557).

The story also allows him to distance himself even further from his actions, since he is looking back at his old self. According to Katz, this is the reason that the reworking of the past in “First Love” fails to provide a solution to the narrator:

To a certain extent, the entire story "First Love" can be seen as a repetition of the ‘fort/da’ game, in which the words of the text and the narrator's body now become the playing board. Indeed, as the story shows, it is the measuring impulse itself that is always inevitably immoderate, as the units of measure always are capable of replacing and extending that which they are meant to demarcate and delimit. (256)

The process of measuring and systemising, which is still part of the narrator’s “winning system,” can never solve the questions that are asked since they simply replace reality with a unit of measurement instead of dealing with the actual problems. Katz continues: “The obsessive and repetitive rewriting and recasting that is typical of ‘First Love’ and Beckett's work as a whole poses trauma in this light: not as an originary kernel to be gradually uncovered and meticulously re-presented, but as a form of writing to be transposed and constantly reworked” (256-7). The narrator’s obsessive measuring does not allow him to work through his experiences, as it is in itself the source of his discomfort.

In summary, it can be concluded that the narrator of “First Love” is dominated by doubt, caused by his uncertainty about the world and his own thoughts. Although control is of great importance to him, his mind is often controlled by his compulsory measuring and systemising. At times, he has even less control over his body and he often distances himself from it, as is also pointed out by Barry’s investigations of the middle voice in Beckett. The narrator’s love for Lulu further increases both his doubts and his lack of control, which makes him feel beside himself and miserable. He tries to regain control by first denying and then

analysing his love and thoughts, but is forced to solve his anxiety by moving in with Lulu. After he leaves, he is still haunted by his first love and the crying of Lulu and her baby at childbirth. In an attempt to understand his behaviour and control himself once more, the narrator tells his story, claiming he has changed his “system” for the last time, into a “winning system.” However, his relation of the story betrays that he is still at mercy of his compulsions. Furthermore, his distanced analysis and the replacement of real problems by measured units bypasses the true problems of his experience. Ultimately, the narrator will not be free of his first love unless he is able to truly accept loss of control and doubt.

Works Cited

- Barry, Elizabeth. "One's Own Company: Agency, Identity and the Middle Voice in the Work of Samuel Beckett." *Journal of Modern Literature* 31.2 (2008): 115-132.
- Beckett, Samuel. "First Love". *I Can't Go On, I'll Go On: A Selection from Samuel Beckett's Work*. Ed. Richard W Seaver. New York: Grove Press, 1976.
- . *Molloy*. *I Can't Go On, I'll Go On: A Selection from Samuel Beckett's Work*. Ed. Richard W Seaver. New York: Grove Press, 1976.
- Boxall, Peter. "Beckett, Samuel." *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*. Ed. David Scott Kastan. 2005. *Oxford University Press*. The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature. Oxford University Press. Utrecht University Library. 14 March 2010. <http://www.oxford-britishliterature.com/entry?entry=t198.e0032>
- Katz, Daniel. "Beckett's Measures: Principles of Pleasure in *Molloy* and 'First Love.'" *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*. 49.2 (2003): 246-260.
- Jean Walton, S. "Extorting Love's Tale from the Banished Son: Origins of Narratability in Samuel Beckett's 'First Love.'" *Contemporary Literature*. 29.4 (1988): 549-563.